DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 346 669 EC 301 281

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TITLE Getting the Job Done: Learning To Expand the Social Resources Available to People with Severe Disabilities at Work.
INSTITUTION Minnesota Univ., Minneapolis. Inst. on Community Integration.; Responsive Systems Associates, Lithonia, GA.; Syracuse Univ., NY. Center on Human Policy.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (ED/OSERS), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 92
CONTRACT H133B80048
NOTE 8p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adults; *Employer Employee Relationship; Employment Potential; Helping Relationship; Interpersonal Competence; *Interpersonal Relationship; Job Training; Needs Assessment; Normalization (Handicapped); *On the Job Training; Resources; *Severe Disabilities; *Social Support Groups; *Supported Employment; Vocational Rehabilitation

ABSTRACT

Innovators in supported employment for individuals with severe disabilities have made important conceptual shifts by broadening their understanding of the resources that they assess and organize as they assist a person with a disability to do a competent job. There have been two important shifts in the service perspective in evaluating what it takes to get a job done. The first shift has expanded the focus from the person alone to the person plus a skilled coach, and involves assessing the job ability of the person with the assistance of a job coach. The number and variety of jobs developed then depends on the number of staff hours and the training skill of the job coach. The second shift has involved broadening identification of important resources to include not only the person's abilities and the job coach's abilities but the organized capacities of all of the available social resources, including: (1) what family, friends, and staff from other programs involved with the person can do to contribute to job success; (2) what the employer makes available to all employees in order to ensure successful job performance; (3) adaptations employers and supervisors make to accommodate a person's disability; and (4) what co-workers are willing to do. Several suggestions are offered to increase the chances that workers with severe disabilities receive active support from their co-workers, and several approaches that discourage employers and co-workers from supporting workers with severe disabilities are also identified. (JDD)

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GETTING THE JOB DONE: LEARNING TO EXPAND THE SOCIAL RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO PEOPLE WITH SEVERE DISABILITIES AT WORK

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1992

Prepared for
The Center on Human Policy
Syracuse University

Preparation of this paper was supported through a subcontract from The Center on Human Policy, Syracuse University for the Research and Training Center on Community Living. The Research and Training Center on Community Living is supported through Cooperative Agreement Number H133B80048 between the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR), Division of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, U.S. Department of Education, and the University of Minnesota, Institute on Community Integration. Members of the Center are encouraged to express their opinions; these do not necessarily represent the official position of NIDRR.

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Getting the Job Done

Learning to Expand the Social Resources Available to People With Severe Disabilities at Work

John O'Brien

Supported employment for people with disabilities has grown rapidly since arising on the US agenda in the mid-1980's and now holds a central place in discussions about future services. With opportunity and assistance, thousands of people previously defined by professional evaluators as unable to ever work refute low expectations as they pick up their paychecks. Their success —and the success of program staff, employers, and co-workers— justifies effort to convert present investments in congregate day services to individual supported employment. As one state's planners have put it,

> "We must develop and implement comprehensive employment programs for persons with disabilities that emphasize our commitment to meaningful work, in an integrated setting, for equitable pay, in an atmosphere of job and support security, with the opportunity for relationships for all adults, regardless of type or severity of disability..." (Minnesota Givernor's Council on Developmental Disabilities. *The Heart of Community is Inclusion... 1990 Report.*)

Innovators in supported employment have made important conceptual shifts by broadening their understanding of the resources that they assess and organize as they assist a person with a disability to do a competent job. There have been two important shifts in the service perspective that frames the answer to the question, "What does it take to get a job done?" With each shift in focus, potential social resources grow more numerous and the ability of supported employment staff to build relationships and organize people becomes more important.

The first shift expands the focus from the person alone to the person plus a skilled coach. Instead of simply assessing the job ability of the person alone, as practitioners within a typical continuum of day services do, supported employment practitioners consider what the person can do with the assistance of a job coach. This shift in focus allows many previously excluded people to work. It also redefines the service resource question and the most important staff function.

When service providers consider only the skills of the person with a disability, the number and variety of jobs developed depends on the number of individuals ready to go to work with minimal help ("We will place more people when the work preparation programs send us more people who are ready to work.") The key staff function is assessment: better assessments yield successful place-

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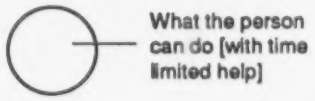
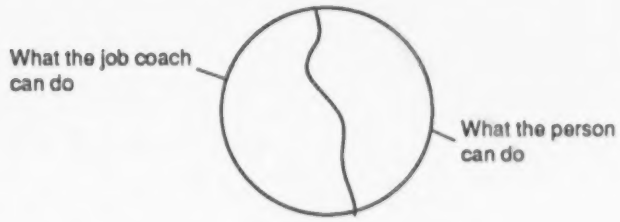
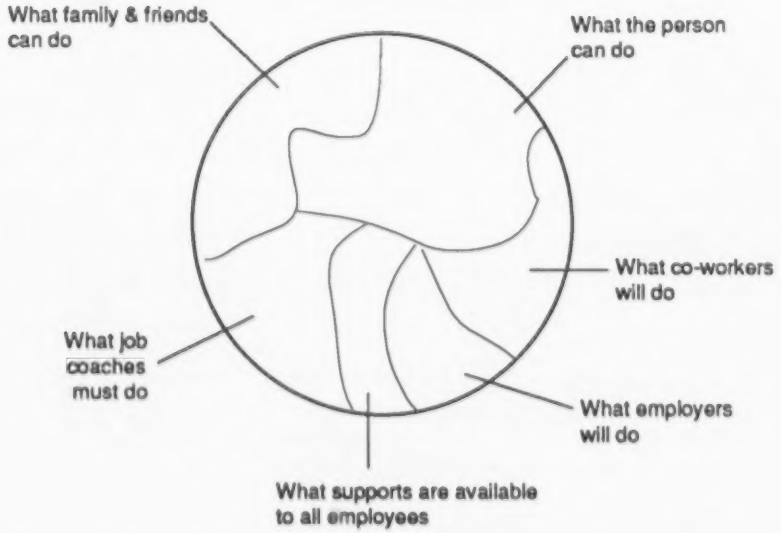
The Changing Focus of Supported Employment

Focus	Central resource question
I. On the **person alone**	
	Who is ready to work?
II. On the **person and** the **job coach**	
	How much help can the program afford to offer?
III. On the social **resources in the whole situation**	
 What family & friends can do What the person can do What co-workers will do What job coaches must do What employers will do What supports are available to all employees	How can we organize the resources available in order to do what it takes to support the person at work?

ments.

When service provider's focus includes assistance from a job coach, the number and variety of jobs developed depends on the number of staff hours and the training skill of the job coach. ("We will place more people, and people with more severe disabilities, when we can buy more hours of more skilled staff time.") The key staff function is training the person with a disability on the job: the better an agency's coaches can train, the more efficient the agency will be.

As supported employment agencies have grown within this focus, many have begun to learn on the job how to enlist co-worker support, make more effective relationships with family members and involved others, and strengthen their partnership with employers and unions. This learning sets the conditions for another shift in focus by broadening identification of important resources to include not only the person's abilities and the job coach's abilities, but the organized capacities of all of the available social resources including:

- What family, friends, and staff from other programs involved with the person can do to contribute to on the job success
- What the employer makes available to all employees in order to insure successful job performance (e.g. training, flexible scheduling, and employee assistance programs).
- Adaptations employers and supervisors are willing to make to accommodate a person's disability, including: workplace modification, job redesign, and more person specific supervision
- What co-workers are willing to do, including: acting as the person's mentor, modifying the ways they perform their jobs, and joining in efforts to plan and revise adaptations.

Different people contribute different amounts and contributions shift over time. The more ably a person performs a particular job, the less others will need to accommodate, so the need for relevant training remains strong. But the job coach positions her or himself as the trainer or provider of other necessary support only if and when employers, supervisors, and co-workers are unwilling to train and support the person or unwilling to learn to do so with the job coach's help.

In this focus, the number and variety of jobs developed depends on how effectively available social resources are organized. The key staff function is discovering and orchestrating the capacity of the people in and around the job situation.

Those who see the focus on organizing available social resources as unrealistically idealistic should stop and think about three things.

Despite a common myth of individual performance, everyone's job success depends on the continuing cooperation of others. People who belong to high performing work teams get more done with greater satisfaction than people whose co-workers feud. People with strong support from family and

friends can more confidently set and pursue goals than isolated people can.

Service workers can easily underestimate the ability and willingness of ordinary people to welcome and accommodate people with disabilities given adequate support. Gina Bagnariol works for the Boeing Corporation and has this to say about her experiences with two co-workers who previously were placed in special units for people with severe mental retardation:

> "Working with individuals with disabilities has had a positive effect on the work environment. Managers in all areas have noticed the positive change in employee morale and have identified supported employment as a key factor in this change. Communication is essential in the continuing success of supported employment. If co-workers and supervisors are not informed and comfortable about working alongside a person with a disability, the concept cannot succeed."

Vickie Porter, a supervisor in the Washington State Employment Security Department, says,

> "Bruce Bird, our employee with disabilities, has taught us that what you do and what you look like are not important; who you are and how you treat others are what matters. With an expected shortage of workers in our future the concept of supported employment will provide a new segment of the population to tap. Jobs can be realigned, as we did in our organization, to take routine work and create jobs that a person with significant disabilities can do. That creates a significant increase in time for professional staff to do technical work"

When employment support staff fall for the myth of independent performance two undesirable consequences usually follow. 1) They may define jobs for people with disabilities as if there was no one else there. In fact they may routinely develop jobs that the person does alone, thus limiting opportunities for integration and choice. 2) Their options for support may polarize between an emphasis on training the person to do the whole job alone or having the job coach become the person's prosthesis. Swinging to the first pole limits the number of people who can have jobs by discriminating against people with greater continuing support needs. Swinging to the second pole reduces the number of people who can have jobs by tying up available job coach hours.

Learning how to work within this focus calls for practitioners to reflect on their experience to reveal what they do that works and what gets in the way of achieving collaboration. A group of supported employment staff identified two contrasting sets of practices which powerfully affect the social resources available to workers with severe disabilities:

If you want to discourage employers and co-workers from supporting workers with severe disabilities:

- ✗ **Right from the beginning, provide employers and co-workers with lots of details about what the person cannot do. Don't wait to see how a new environment will**

effect the person; prepare employers and co-workers for the worst.

✗ Don't involve the person with a disability in the interview. Keep the person away from the employer and co-workers until staff have made all the arrangements.

✗ Push "incentives" and certificates much harder than the person's ability as a reason to hire. This will accentuate the person's disability and difference in everyone's mind.

✗ Use lots of labels, acronyms, and jargon when talking with employers and co-workers so they have no idea what you are talking about. This will set you apart from them as the real specialist in dealing with whatever it is that's "wrong" with the person. It will also help them decide that whatever the person needs is too exotic for them to understand, much less do.

✗ Issue human service name tags to job coaches and have them wear them on the job. Be sure that job coaches dress really differently from employees in the workplace.

✗ Tell employers and co-workers, "If you want to tell the person anything, tell me and I'll pass it along." This is especially effective if employers and coworkers get the impression that the person will break down or blow up if someone other than the job coach speaks to them.

✗ Be clear to the person with a disability, "You can't do this job without the coach." The coach should teach the person to ask questions of the coach, saving them up for the coach's next visit if necessary. The coach should act hurt if the person does something independently or if the person asks a co-worker or supervisor for help or instructions.

✗ Arrange the job so that the person arrives and departs and has breaks and lunch at different times from co-workers.

✗ Have the person use a different system of time keeping than the other employees.

✗ Have the person arrive for work on a clearly marked "special" bus. Have the driver escort the person to the job if the person does not need assistance; have the driver leave the person at the curb if the person does need assistance.

✗ Pay no attention to trying to change ways the person's appearance or mannerisms may effect the willingness of co-workers and supervisors to get involved. (Call this "extinction" or "empowerment.")

✗ The coach should "model" the job continuously and give the person no opportunity to perform tasks for self. If a person does start to do the tasks, identify errors very quickly and push the person aside to "model" some more. Justify this as good instruction or, if that fails, as meeting employer expectations.

To increase the chances that workers with severe disabilities receive active support from their co-workers:

✓ Stay out of the middle. Employers and co-workers are often uncomfortable or

uncertain about how to relate to a person with a severe disability. This creates a push from the workplace side to put the job coach in the middle, between the person with a disability and others in the work place. The person with a disability may be uncomfortable with a new place and prefer to interact with someone from a familiar place. This creates a push from the disabled employee's side to put the job coach in the middle.

✓ In the job development process, make it clear to the employer and supervisor that they are the boss and that the person with a disability is their employee. Be sure everyone knows that the job coach's job is to assist, not to do the job. Identify the job coach as having specific, negotiated responsibilities, depending on the job and the person with disabilities, for...

... identifying ways the workplace or the job need to be adapted and providing necessary help with adaptations

...any training the person may need in addition to that usually available to new hires

...necessary help in dealing with problems when the people on the job can't work them out for themselves in a way that is satisfactory to everyone

... help in managing crises

...necessary help in getting oriented to the job and the workplace

✓ The purpose of the job coach's job is to provide the assistance necessary to the employer, the supervisor, co-workers, or the person with a disability to insure that the person experiences all the benefits of being a productive worker. The job coach can coach anybody; not just the person with a disability.

✓ The job coach: doesn't just learn the job, the coach learns the workplace. Doesn't just teach the job; but teaches the workplace. The coach finds out how the workplace routine offers people the chance for interaction with co-workers. The coach finds out about how breaks, lunch, and before and after work rituals go. The coach works on getting to know co-worker and supervisors as people. The coach helps the worker with a disability learn the workplace as well as the job.

✓ Be sure the job coach is very clear about the standard of performance that is acceptable; the ways performance problems are typically managed in the workplace; and work group norms about the flow and pace of work (which may be different in some important ways from employer specifications). Be sure the job coach doesn't act like a mother hen, expecting perfection or getting upset whenever the person makes an error.

Those who see promoting cooperation among diverse people in addition to offering skillful teaching and job adaptation as demanding and difficult work are correct. But learning to orchestrate all of the social resources available to people with severe disabilities at work offers the possibility of significant social change.